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A WAND AND STRINGS

A WAND AND STRINGS

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

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"THE SAILOR WHO HAS SAILED AND OTHER POEMS"

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TO

MY FATHER

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Contents

	PAGE
A Wand and Strings	11
Cradle Song	13
Late Surrender	15
All Things New	16
Words Are No More	18
Idyl	20
The First Death	24
The Blind Seer	30
To an Unborn Child	36
To a Suicide	40
Petals	44
White Violets	45
Forget Me Not	47
Good-bye	48
Ghosts	50
The Hinterland	52
With a Volume of Verse	54
As It Looked to One	55
As It Looked to Another	58
As It Was from the Beginning	62
Inspiration	64
Litany with the Evening Star	65
To the Moon in the Sunset	71

Contents

	PAGE
Nocturne	74
Dawn	78
All Other Loves	80
The House of the Poet	82
Freely, as It Behooves Us	85
Epilogue to the American Revolution	88
The Washington Statue in Wall Street	91
Fifty Years After	92
Rough-Hew Them How We Will	94
To Helen	97
To Veronica	99
Psyche	100
When the Wind Blows	102
From Whence the Road	104
The Klinger Beethoven	106
To an Old Family Servant	107
A Prelude to Hamlet	108
Legend	123
Now That We Know	129
Knight's Parting	131
The Trail of Silence	135

A WAND AND STRINGS

A Wand and Strings

PLAY, lonely spirit, play!
With plaintive, pleading tone;
Ladders of moonlight, jasmine spray,
The scent of honey, and new-mown hay, —
My love and I, alone.

Play, lonely spirit, play!
With clouds and sunset fire;
Kisses and curtsies, gallants gay,
The flash of swords and the glint of day, —
Romance is my desire.

Play, lonely spirit, play!
A lilting cradle croon;
Murmurs in tree-tops, silken sway,
The touch of fingers that soothe away, —
I float beyond the moon.

A Wand and Strings

Play, lonely spirit, play!
With brave, exulting skill;
Mountains in fetters, grim and gray,
The wide, wide ocean, the fields of May, —
I stand before thee . . . still.

Cradle Song

SUNLIGHT and starlight and waning moon,
Path me the purple sky;
Over and under, and none too soon, —
Float me and let me fly.

Plunge me down deep in the golden West;
Breathe me along the light;
Over and under, and never rest, —
Clear to the last delight.

Clear to the place where my lady fair
Keepeth her dreams, apart;
She dwells alone with her long, bright hair,
And deep, unhurried heart.

A Wand and Strings

You will find her best where fountains rise,
Three circles of splendid streams;
You will know my lady by her eyes,
And by her silver dreams.

Set me down soft at her shining feet,
And I will venture this; —
To break the spell of her pale retreat
With love and a lover's kiss!

Starlight and sunlight and waning moon,
Back to the edge of day;
Under and over, but not too soon, —
Lazily lead the way.

Late Surrender

THE wonder was that I should be
Within thy realm at all,
I could not think thou thoughtest me
More than thy seneschal.

I could not guess thy level gaze,
And queen's unflinching eye,
Should downward falter for my praise,
Or heed me, passing by.

Now, like a ship, full-rigged with pride,
I spread to every gale, —
Top-gallanted, a sea-wave wide,
My love's triumphant sail.

All Things New

When day has turned her eyes away,
And dusk once more
Comes creeping through the firelight
Along the floor;—
O heart of mine, the meaning in
An open door!

When midnight stirs the veils of sleep,
And drowsy eyes
Go drooping down through gateways
Of delicious sighs;—
O heart of mine, the knowing *this*
No dream surmise!

When overhead a silence is,
And one last star

All Things New

Remembers other morning peaks
Of golden spar; —
O heart of mine, the miracle
That mornings are!

Words Are No More

Words are no more;
There is no help in sighs,
Nor utterance in eyes, —
Which served before.

Now are we come
Beyond the place of such;
Having so very much,
Must needs be dumb.

Wanting to say
The whole of our great sight,
Needs must we lose in light
The narrow way.

Words Are No More

Waves on the shore
Silence our inland speech;
Walking God's ocean beach,
Words are no more.

Idyl

I HEAR the humming of a swarm of bees
Trailing the honey through the cherry trees,
Whose petaled blossoms break like foaming seas
  On misty shores of far-away;
And ever, through my idle, open door,
Sweet scents of morning myriadly pour;
Summer, just breathing, sleeps upon the floor; —
  The year is Youth, the month is May.

O Musidora, with your Gypsy hair
And eyes of sudden shadow, where, oh, where
Is there a forest glade so fitting fair,
  To hold you as you are, to-day? —
When all the little leaves are spread for you,
And all the blossoms lift a head for you,

And every dew-drop is unshed for you? —
Say, if you know one; say, oh, say!

One moment, silent, looking very wise,
She ponders me; the next, with dancing eyes,
She takes my hand, and out of doors she flies.
The garden and the orchard, first;
A stretch of high-road, then a broken wall;
A pathway over fields, the rise and fall
Of fallows; then . . . a thicket, and the tall
Aisles of a minster, green-immersed.

Here, if ever, Musidora, is the place, —
(I pillow me on moss, with upturned face,
And through the foliage just dimly trace
White clouds and darling stains of blue)
To put all mask and mystery behind,
And be like children, met with open mind.
(The leaves are singing overhead, the wind
Is after them) I will: will you?

A Wand and Strings

A peal of laughter: can it be? — I look,
To find myself, the cause of it, forsook,
And Musidora, barefoot, in a brook.
  This is your answer, then, arch maid?
No sooner seen than done; off hose and shoon!
(Brook water frolics to a lively tune:
The boughs bend low, the leaves are whisper-
    strewn)
  I am a child, and you? (We wade.)

Oh, happy as the day is long, to be
With Musidora, thus, in Arcady! —
(I an untutored shepherd-lad, and she,
  A shepherdess, with wind-blown hair).
Oh, time, stand still! — what, just this little
    day? —
And sloping shadows, turn your eyes away;
Leave us, ah, leave us, here, with youth — and
    May!
  (They heed not; are unpitiful to prayer.)

Idyl

And now pale evening lifts her lowly eyes
To look between her fingers at the skies;
And softly looking, looks away — and sighs.
  Come, Musidora, maiden, come:
Leave we the bosky woods and pleasant steeps,
The brooks and vales; and while the first star
    creeps
Over the hillside where the long grass sleeps, —
  Since day is ended now, come home.

The First Death

I COULD wish the world were, as lately, wound
In stiff, creaking mail, —
Perfect proof to storm, triple brass all around,
Bare-headed and pale:
It were better . . . trees are truest in rime,
And the fight best fought when stark branches climb
On a northeast gale.

This wide May morning, where the loosed winds go
Into cloudless air,
And white petals are flushed with pink, as though
The bosom were bare
Of a maid who trembled with love, and sighs; —
It is all too sweet for my untamed eyes;
It is all too fair.

The First Death

It is all too fashioned out of young men's dreams;
Such as tear them through
A whole forest of brambles, with soft gleams,
And then turn untrue:
And then prove to be faithless to those they led;
Who believed them, and followed, and fought, and bled,
And conquered — some few.

But it matters no more; I well perceive
The whole of the lie;
There is not, on earth, a thing to believe,
And cling to, and die:
There is not one faith with unfaithless wings,
To be wound with arms through all wanderings, —
Proud, perfect, and high.

I remember how, when flowers first came,
I would reach a hand,

A Wand and Strings

In hot haste to be plucking their white flame;
Laid bare a whole land
With my forays, thinking thus I should get
What they were: always failed it, and yet
Did not understand.

But oh, now . . . I know. This wide, morning place,
And wind-tempered sky; —
I would hold aloof, with averted face,
And bid them pass by:
It will chance, I trust, I shall bear this thing,
As is needful; but not . . . not while the spring
Is asking me why.

Over rocks, cold rocks, unto ice and snow,
Well shod with tough steel,
To storm craggy nooks of death let me go;
Fearless let me feel,

The First Death

Finger-deep, the crevice whereby to crawl
One foot more unto God, or else . . . to fall
Under God's rude heel.

This wide May morning; — how the blood sings high
With breathing sweet airs
From shy flowers that fold in their petals, I
Know not what warm prayers!
I do think that their hearts hold, sometimes, fears
Lest they fail of a bliss, and turn to tears
With to-morrow's cares.

This wide May morning; — were a heart a rose,
'T would open — it must:
But why bring me to this garden-close, —
Whose heart is in dust?
If it be that God has ordained for men
Hopeless hunger for happiness, then — then —
Thou, God, art unjust!

A Wand and Strings

Art unjust — unjust; what is justice? — this? —
To play fair with the truth?
Am I just? do I . . . take the truth amiss?
What, never, in sooth?
Am I just, who call the whole world a lie,
For one twinge of sorrow, one twist awry? —
What, and in my youth?

Nay, but Lord, it is hard when temples fall:
Let me lift my eyes
Out of ruin, past wreckage — thou art all —
To where the stars rise,
A gemmed bridle flung forward to lead the day
From the dark; — bring me also, Lord, I pray,
Into unbreathed skies!

Let me look, henceforth, beyond the strong pain
To the love behind;
Let me wince no link of the whole white chain
Which the flowers wind,

The First Death

When they call, and I cannot . . . thou knowest,
Lord;
Let me bare my breast to thy dim, sharp sword
With unbitter mind.

Be my life but well-lived; however life be
Unlovely, uncouth; —
So I look with clear eyes — O Lord, let me
Play fair with the truth!
Let me strip, more and more, thy wistful sky
Of these tendril arms! O Lord, I will try . . .
I, I in my youth.

The Blind Seer

I FIND it pleasant here, of afternoons:
The sun is tempered by a taste of sea;
The beach is just below; and while I have
Enough of city not beyond my call,
The noise is lulled.

Sit there: the stone will cool
With early shadows from the temple wall:
Apollo with his hand before his face;
A jest I think of, more than once, with smiles.

How fell it that I am — this that I am?
I lost my eyes, and so . . . I learned to see.
I do not jest with you on this: 't is truth,
As I will show, to patience and good heed.

The Blind Seer

Eyes? I had eyes beyond the most of men.
I touched each star of all the Pleiades;
Tracked deer at dawn; spied fish in runnel beds,
And sifted tree-tops through a driving rain.
I was the first, scarce but a lad, to see
The glint of galleys on the ocean's rim,
When friend or foe, we knew not which, was
near;
And winnowed-out the foremost for our own.
I won a wreath for that.

But most of all
I lived with color. Color was my home.
Hours at a time I haunted, chin in hand,
The cloudy edges of old, battered cliffs;
Whence, body-prone, I scrutinized the sea.
I never wearied, watching. Hues were sounds
And sang to me: a breaking wave broke song
More beautiful than surge; the soaring trees
Made music for the modulating sun,

A Wand and Strings

More perfect than the wind's on summer nights.
I walked, and echoes of faint colors flew,
Like snatches of sweet birds, from everywhere.
I dreamed, with half-closed eyes, and madrigals
Fell from the moon, or dwindled with the West.
I heard the flutings of anemones;
The blare of poppies in the sallow wheat;
And plucked rich major-chords of bliss
From trellised roses on the garden wall.
They took it all away. I lost my sight.

You 've seen a flower pillaged from its place; —
Poor bruised-of-stalk! — its petals and bowed head
Plumbing the last abyss of abject woe:
I wonder if it blames the gods, as I;
Cries them unjust, and maledicts their world?
Most like. At any rate it dies. I lived.
First died, then lived: a sort of after-death,
A twilight before dawn, that was not death,

Nor, either, life. I felt as wounded do,
That see their bodies torn, and feel no hurt;—
Ill-fated houses, all their folk from home,
Gutted with ruin by marauding bands
Whom no one stays; while household gods look down,
From by the hearth-side, stolid, through the din.

Thus; many days. At length there smiled a dawn
When one emboldened breeze slipped past my sill
With perfumes in its arms, and trailing flowers.
I sniffed the spring; and lo, I lived again.
No more with just that loosing of great winds
To ride the world, which was my want before;
But in the quiet footpaths, step by step,
More mindful of each whisper by the way;
I walked.

A Wand and Strings

Whether it was a something in my face,
A sadness with an afterthought of peace,
Or some serener purpose of the mind,
By pain imposed; I know not. But they came.
I could give help, it seemed, to multitudes.

You 've entered, out of sunlight, a dark room,
And slowly yielded to its gentler rays,
Until, at last, what had been blind, you saw.
So I. They called it miracles of sight.
I gave them counsel once, when peril spoke,
That brought unlooked-for victory in lands
Where late our arms had crumbled. That was how
I won the title: " He who saved the state."
You've lived here long? You know the rest of me.

The tide should be at ebbing-point by now.
The wind is making: in an hour or more

The Blind Seer

The reef off yonder headland will be white.
I used to love it, when the sun was low.

You understand? You will remember me?
Remember what I learned! I lost my sight,
You see, to win it back again. Just so.
And what had hurt me most was most my joy.
A man is happy by the pain he 's borne.
I never knew it, else. Life is like that.

To an Unborn Child

THOU knowest not: yet the warm, white clover
Fills with the song of sun-browed bees,
And ships are weighing, the wide-world over,
To lift bright foam on forgetful seas.
Thou knowest naught of the south wind's freighting,
Tossed in the far-off surge of trees; —
Of sailor's hope, or lover's waiting:
Unborn, thou knowest naught of these.

What will avail to thee, not yet hearing,
Rumors of lovers steeped in sighs;
Of deep, deep kisses, warm and endearing, —
Of red lips ripened, or downcast eyes?
What will bring home to thee, not yet living,
The joyful hazard of life's emprise;

To an Unborn Child

The leap of heart in the throes of giving
All, to the utmost, prodigal-wise?

Thou knowest naught of sea winds, soft breathing,
Or inland pastures of fertile loam
With bright, young blades from the stalk unsheathing,
And nibbled roots where the white flocks roam:
Naught are to thee the whispering heather,
And orchards billowed in fragrant foam;—
Naught the long light, and the golden weather,
Clear, to the tip of its azure dome.

Even as when the ebb tide is turning,
Round the smooth stairs the current is still,—
Lap-full with stars, no longer yearning
To hurry seaward for good or ill;

So will the dawn, just ere it wake thee,
Pause to take breath on the topmost hill;
Then into life it will plunge, and take thee;
Then thou wilt drink, to the very fill.

Light-footed, fleet, through sky-covered places;
Prone on the earth, wearied-out with play;
Running companions immortal races;
Fighting world battles in fresh, warm hay:
Knee-deep in trenches of sand, on beaches;
Following brooks through a summer's day;
Lost to the world, down cool, green reaches . . .
All will be thine, in its own sweet way.

Now . . . thou art not; with unthought-of flowers,
And undreamed moonlight, perilous as wine;—
With languid noons, and golden, soft showers,
And sudden shivers of shade and shine

To an Unborn Child

A woman's hair makes, while she reposes; —
With songs unsung, and beakers divine
Full of unquaffed youth, starlight, and roses . . .
Thou that art not, all these shall be thine.

Thou knowest not: yet the warm, white clover
Fills with the drone of sun-drenched bees,
And ships are sailing the wide world over,
Bitted with foam, on forgetful seas.
Thou knowest naught of the precious freighting
Coming ashore in the surge of trees; —
Of summer's hope, and winter's waiting:
Unborn, thou knowest naught of these.

To a Suicide

God help you! — was there nothing else to do
Than this, sad thing? Some vision turned untrue
And traitored you as well, we must suppose;
Or else a woman, and false love; who knows?
Death speaks a thousand tongues: one will suffice.

You were a man marked out for sacrifice, —
Or so you thought, from early boyhood days:
You were the sport of fortune's wildest ways,
And worst of all, you were not understood;
A grievous thing: what profits bad or good,
Without?

I see it all, the gloom and grime
Of city streets; gray streets, immersed in slime;

To a Suicide

The want of love, the loneliness, the pain
That love alone could loose; the ugly grain
And twisted fibre of your life; and last,
The horror of monotony you passed.

I see the thinness of the half-clad room, —
Cracked ceiling slants, cold peaks of gabled
gloom,
And prison plainness of an iron bed.
What was a window worth, high overhead?
Perchance one flower there . . . now, you are
dead.

They say, in dying, men are young once more,
And do remember much that went before.
I wonder . . . you were not yet old . . . did
you,
After this bottle drained, a bottle blue
As is the sky you hated so, did you

A Wand and Strings

Come suddenly on long-forgoten days
And early loves? Did some reluctant haze
Roll back, and let you see? and were you, then,
Made sorry by a face? your mother's? Men
Remember mothers when they die. Did you?

I wonder if with dying came at last
Some glint of truth, a cloud-rift floating past,
The sun could glory through. You knew so
well
The daily-uppermost of life, the shell.
Did death go deeper? Was the future shown?
Men call cathedrals "Music turned to stone";
But in their transepts gaunt crusaders lie,
Imperishable, on monuments, and I
Think theirs the truer music, whose renown
Is like clear trumpets clarioning down
A victory. With them, in long review,
Are doughty admirals; and statesmen, who,

To a Suicide

With silver tongue, the common weal intone;
And poets, raptured, singing from their stone.
These dared to die; gave all they had to give;
But most of all, they dared . . . they dared to
live!

The vacant window darkens overhead,
And evening sounds are in the street below:
Along the walls grim shadows creep and flow.

He fights no more who lies on yonder bed,
Fearing to live . . . God help you! — you are
dead.

Petals

THE morning looses petals of the rose,
And breathes them through her fingers carelessly;
Light heart, she plucked them unintendingly;—
Her eyes forget them even while she blows.

The morning's heart is fickle with first flowers,
And flutters with her birds from spray to spray;
Over a blossom bent, she turns away,
Nor heeds the shadows pilfering her hours.

But thou . . . I pray for thee some better part
Than Morning's, blowing petals in the air;
Ah, be a child, be ever, ever fair;
Have childish hands, but have a woman's heart!

White Violets

Tears that never quite touched earth,
  Passion-buds that lie
Stillborn of a fruitless birth, —
  Stars from a dead sky.

Not with purple pulses borne
  Down wild tides of play;
Ages since, an elfin horn
  Witched their youth away.

Blanched with their own beauty; pale,
  Much as maids might be,
Looking long for one soft sail
  Swallowed by the sea.

A Wand and Strings

Much as they who, stooped with years,
  Listen all alone,
Hearing faint, through far-off ears,
  Voices they have known.

Children of too gentle birth,
  Here these flowers lie;
Love that never quite touched earth, —
  They . . . and thou and I.

Forget Me Not

FORGET me not when I am gone away
Into the world, beyond thee and thy peace;
My argosy bears back no golden fleece,
Nor leaves thee, laden, out of charmed Cathay:
Yet, as I seaward turn my prow, I pray;
Yet, as we part, I lean to thee, Félice;—
Remember me beyond the shores of Greece,
Forget of me, no more than yesterday.

The shadows of old days, ah, let them go;
Heed of me only in some quiet spot,
Dreaming beside thee, dreaming . . . thou dost
know . . .
Heed of me hoping still, with ebb and flow;
Though all forget me, well, I am forgot;
Shouldst thou forget . . . Félice, forget me not!

Good-bye

THERE have been farewells between us,
Spoken, half, and half, a sigh;
More than one deep cup of parting
We have drunk of, you and I;
Till the seas wore down endurance,
And we crossed them, with a cry:
This . . . is good-bye.

One can weather-out a parting,
When each corner of the sky,
And each blade of grass, is kindled
With a later drawing-nigh;—
When each day is but the leading
For a happier reply:
But not good-bye.

Good-bye

There are steeps no soul surrenders, —
  Love itself lifts not so high;
Though the temple veil be anguished,
  And the price be "Crucify!"
Far along familiar mountains
  I shall see the love-light die:
    This is good-bye.

Ghosts

Gently through my jalousie
The moonlight filters in to me,
With sounds and perfumes of the sea,
And muted wings of memory:
Speak of remembrance as of prayer;
Grieve not the dead who gather there.

Grieve not them who long ago
Hither came, soft-eyed and slow;
Who sighed, and went away in woe, —
Who could not know, who could not know:
The world was otherwise than dreams;
It is not, ever, what one deems.

Fading flowers down the wind,
Wet with tears, with weeping, blind;

Ghosts

Grieve not them who thought to find
Better than they left behind:
Grieve, ah, grieve not them who knew
Naught but things that turned untrue.

Here, to-night, the sweet sea falls
Weirdly, underneath my walls;
Up and down deserted halls
I hear their calls, forgotten calls:
Grieve not the ghosts who linger there;
Speak of remembrance as of prayer.

The Hinterland

I CANNOT keep thee from my dreams,
  However else I put thee by;
My frozen brooks are running streams,
  When thou, in dreams, art once more nigh.

I wake with all defences down,
  That were so hardly built by me;
Scarcely a single moated town
  Remains unleveled to the sea.

I wake, and unlethargic know
  The bitterness of banished pain;
Thy coming leaves me once more low,
  I take thy loss to heart again.

By this I know I am not king
  Beyond one strip of sand and sea;

The Hinterland

For inland are such folk as bring
  Rebellious loyalty to thee.

Under a snow-clad mountain range,
  Behind the bosom of the hills,
They dwell, and yield no hope of change
  Such as the empty sea-coast wills.

Thrice-girt in steel, to hold thee where
  Thy loveliness less poignant seems . . .
Betrayed, my people strip me bare, —
  I cannot keep thee from my dreams.

With a Volume of Verse

LIKE to a brook that through a garden flows,
And all the while is giving as it goes;
Or like the shadows that the winds unclose
From underneath the eyelids of a rose:
Like sunlight that a winter morning throws
On crags of cloud all bosomy with snows;
Or elf-shine, on a summer's eve that glows,
(A haze of stars such as no heaven shows);
Or perfumes of the first warm wind, that blows
Out of the South, and blesses, and bestows . . .
Like these thou art, dost unto these belong;
Despaired of poets and unchained of song.

As It Looked to One

I HEAR soft whispers underneath my door,
And on the floor
Are windy shadows, and a silken sigh
Flutters faint wings, comes near me, passes by,
And is no more.

The soul is very perfect such a night,
When, warm with flight,
The moon her scarves and cloudy draperies
Slowly unwinds, and naked to her knees,
Shivers in light.

The soul is very perfect to take tune, —
This heart of June, —
From leaf-chord lyres, and sleepy bands of birds
That drowse awake to melodize with words
Old themes of swoon.

And floating out of other worlds than they, —
From far away,
Are petal winds detachèd from a rose
In perfumed gardens of the rose-jar close
Of old Cathay.

Winds that in precincts of the Sultan were
Once, and did stir,
Softly, in and out, through filigrees of gold;
And now, like merchants, make their wares unfold,
Smelling of myrrh.

Almost as if some maiden loosed her hair, —
Some maiden fair,
Around her shoulders, and its waftures fell
All dimly sweet on me — on me, as well,
Worshipping there.

As if I held her, breathing, to my breast,
And touched and pressed

As It Looked to One

All of her, lying soft, in one embrace
That brought her beauty brimming to her face
On a bright crest

Of sudden joy, and poised it there while I
Kissed it to die;
And all around were summer, and this moon,
Sleeping, and being amorous with June,
Under the sky.

The soul is very perfect; yet it seems
Too cold for dreams:
And in the slipping sand-glass of the years,
What if we did mistake, and lose? One fears . . .
Too cold for dreams!

I hear soft whispers underneath my door,
And on the floor
Are broken shadows, and a far-off sigh
Flutters its wings, comes near me, passes by,
And is no more.

As It Looked to Another

How old the moon looks! And those tendril vines
The wind entwines
In that long window, how, upon the glass,
They scrape their finger-tips — just to harass
One man, who dines!

There is a dampness in the air to-night,
Vaporing white
From the rank fens in which miasma lies:
These guttered candles much disturb my eyes
With fitful light.

Closed windows will be best — even in June.
It seems that soon
Nothing remains, where so much used to be:
I can remember when an apple tree
And one round moon . . .

'As It Looked to Another

I had a soul once, and could taste good wine.
All things were mine, —
I thought they were, — and just to breathe, and
touch,
Got heaven in my hands. I had too much:
Too much, in fine.

A woman is too much. She seems to be
Divinity:
Take her, and she becomes all flesh; far more
All passive flesh than one had bargained for,
Or hoped to see.

And Bruno's copy of the Lisa, there, —
With her dark hair,
And smile, is just like all the others, I
Could wager of it; one would like to try . . .
She and her 'hair!

A Wand and Strings

I would there were a pennyworth in "love";—
Being a glove
We hide our souls in, lest the naked touch
Shall prove a trifle — like as not — too much
To venture of.

Wine in decanters! First we broach the tun,
As here was done,
To fill the cask; then bung the cask as well,
To make a bottle-full: each time dispel
Part of the sun,

The golden sun, that wine is. All we touch
Changes that much.
The remedy, I take it, is . . . more wine;
And more and more. The soul? I drowned out mine;—
What passed as such.

As It Looked to Another

How hot the room is! Did the daylight hold,
One could be told
Of better things than frittering away,
Here in this corner. Now . . . it would not pay:
The moon looks old.

As It Was from the Beginning

Set in a niche of living rock, I stand;
And thou art with me; we two, side by side:
Behind us is a neck of narrow land;
Before us foams, in cruel swales, the tide.

No room is here for querulous debate,
For disputatious tongues, or broken ban;
Life is the issue . . . thine, my woman mate,
And mine, thy comrade and thy rough-thewed man.

I kneel not, in idolatry of stone;
Yet thou art precious, more than pelf or pride:
Thy nearness is my panoply, alone;
I thirst for battle, thou against my side.

As It Was from the Beginning

I thirst for battle, and it comes; the deep
  Gives up Goliath, one, huge, frowning wave.
Dark, that roars over us; thunders, that sweep . . .
  I feel thee, thou art with me, I am brave!

Inspiration

LIKE some sweet day thou art, exceeding rare,
That after turbulent, October gales,
Floats on a pool of deep, enchanted air, —
A shallop rose-leaf with unfluttered sails.

A day on which the world, at war so soon,
Takes sacrament, putting its armor by;
Before pale winter rings again the moon,
And bitter snowflakes choke the tender sky.

Now, after hours with thee, as daylight dies,
And over oceans evening voices are;
White on my heart a singing pathway lies:
I leave thee, breathless, with thy gift — a star.

Litany with the Evening Star

The Star

Lift up your hearts; the smoulder-thickened sky
Flames to the thousand altars of the West:

The People

We lift them up; the vales of evening lie
Cool, and their shadows quiet us to rest.

O thou who givest to the purple sea,
And on the mountains utterest away;
Thou that with night dost whisper stars to be,
And art, with rose-buds, filled with dew; and
day:

Thou whose wild feet are in the brimming tides
And windy chorals of insurgent spring;

A Wand and Strings

(When flowers worship, and a true god hides
In every flutter of a wood-bird's wing:)

Thou that art deathless when the dead leaves go,
And huddled harvests grieve the dying year;
That bringest frost-light flying through the
snow; —
Sleigh bells,
And happy hearth-sides;
hear!
oh, hear!

By what thou tellest to the little streams
That filter downward to a far-off sea;
By what the robin learns of thee, that dreams
Her nest and brood, swayed in an apple tree:

By the sweet sense that makes the crocus rise
Long ere the winter rushes out in rain;

Litany with the Evening Star

By all the wonderment that lives and lies
In buds of April bursting forth again:

By moth wings, and the modesty of pearls,
And shell tints inexpressible and dear;
By sleep-blown children pillowed on their curls, —
By all thy gentleness,
we pray thee,
hear!

For those who suffer, underneath the sky, —
(Poor pensioners of pain, that crave surcease!)
For women in their travail tears that lie;
For beds of fever parched and out of peace:

For those who toil to keep alive a spark, —
(Poor pittancers with porringers of lead!)
For wolfish eyes and hunters in the dark;
And souls that shrivel ere a child is fed:

A Wand and Strings

For all frail flesh that follows foolish ways, —
(Poor penitents that sicken and are sere!)
For lonely midnights and insipid days; —
(Poor parted lovers!)
we beseech thee,
hear!

And we beseech thee, let our prayers uphold
Young men who come to battle unafraid; —
Who plunge with ardor in the world's keen cold:
Proof thou their spirits like a tempered blade!

We crave thee, look with tenderness on those
Who drink deep reveries with far-off eyes;
Oh, send thy pity when a sunset glows
On poets reft of utterance by skies!

Hover on those who, voiceless, have not sung,
Yet, being earth-bound, tremble to be clear,

Litany with the Evening Star

And climb to thee on beauty, rung by rung;—
Hear us, and help them,
we beseech thee,
hear!

Shrive us for looking with too narrow gaze;
For judgment when we knew not what was just;
For envy, and unhonorable dispraise;
For hatred,
and hard-heartedness,
and lust.

Guard us from vapors of low-vaulted night,
On evil-smelling bat wings that embark;
From fierce invasion and slow-moving spite;
From guiltiness,
from terror,
from the dark!

A Wand and Strings

Spare us to lift sweet eyelids when the dew
In individual stars divides the day;—
When birds break out, and winds are coming
through;
Spare,
and be young with us!—
spare us,
we pray!

Go, now, in peace; the sable-hooded sky
Stoops to the waning altars of the West:

We go, in peace, the lanes of evening lie
Hushed, and their shadows lead us down to rest.

To the Moon in the Sunset

THOU dream, that with awaking dost not go,
Like other dreams, out of a too sweet sky,
But art reluctant with the afterglow,
And but a breath, art too frail-spun to die;
This eve in loveliness thou wast once more
Left lingering, the far-retreating sea
Straining away from round thy budding breast —
Thou maiden still half child — and on the shore
A little while so lying, thus confessed,
The hard world trembled with beholding thee.

What was there so prevailing, in the air,
That charmed thee thither from thy close-kept
home,
For dusk to find thee, with unribboned hair
And limbs yet languid with subsiding foam? —
What dwelt there in the palpitating light

A Wand and Strings

To lift thy heart so errantly away,
That flinging far thy sandals, with soft feet
Thou camest down the confines of the day? —
What steep enchantment did the stars indite,
To stay thee thus, so past-enduring sweet?

Thou with all other youth, art timid-bold,
And being naked, hast no thought of shame,
Yet fearest eyes; and white with virgin cold,
Yet art all hovered-on with unlit flame.
Just at the poise, with shadows overwrought,
In the first breaths of faintly-stirred desire;
Thou art perplexed, thy held-out, eager hands
Have drooping fingers, as were some late thought
Refraining thee, too frivolous of fire:
With thee all youth upon the threshold stands.

With thee, as in some forest without stars,
Dreaming and pale, trance-held, a wondrous night

To the Moon in the Sunset

We waited, while the branches became bars,
Bare and unstirring, and immortal light
Shook down warm color on awaking hills:
Then thou, and we, and the whole forest woke,
Delirious with joy; and far away
A bird was singing on the morning sills,
And all the world grew tremulous, and spoke;
And while we listened . . . long ago 't was day.

But thou, white maiden, art each month made new,
A star-child wistful at the brink once more;
And warm earth-children, scattering the dew,
Brush through pale flowers to the selfsame shore.
O happy youth, that so divinely art
Forever on the footprints of our woe!
O bliss of all beginnings, thou so sweet,
And ne'er unthrilled-to in the oldest heart! —
Thou tellest us that our soon tired feet
Into eternal fresh existence go!

Nocturne

The cool sea air
Is full of lullabies and songs to-night,
With whispers of late wings in homeward flight,
And soft waves, where,
Behind dark trees, the ocean, safe from sight,
Lets loose her hair.

And thou and I,
Globed in this air, are turned to music, too;
And intertwine, and falter, and pursue;
Or downward die
Upon an ecstasy, as rose-leaves do
When winds come by.

How far away
The world seems; and how easy to forego!

Nocturne

To be just here, and take thy fingers, so . . .
Nor need to say
A single word, yet faithfully to know . . .
Is heaven's way.

Could time but be
Impaled upon some mountain peak of bliss . . .
Be caught a-tip-toe in a stolen kiss,
And stilled; that we
Might tremble undeterred, close, close, like this,
Eternally!

Ah, think not we
Idly shall float in air, whom life has flung,
Such scattered seeds, to germinate among
Earth's family; —
Thou whose lithe limbs are all as yet unwrung
With agony.

A Wand and Strings

Thou whose soft hands
Are unexpert with that too blissful fire
All men must touch, and touching, see expire; —
Through desperate lands
Followed and lost, or, oceaned in desire,
Seethed out on sands.

Life is like touch.
See, at thy inside arm, that satin place,
Just where it bends: a man might sink his face,
And own too much
For earth; and yet . . . a child would not retrace
One step for such.

So, when we kneel
At God's dim outer-porch, about to die, —
Breathless with stars (the unfamiliar sky
Death will reveal),

Nocturne

Then we shall say: "Now give me Life, for
Have learned to feel!"

The wind, to-night,
Is full of wanderings, and soft sea-sighs;
Deep in the dusk belated lullabies
Droop and alight:
Love, I am weary, let my half-closed eyes . . .
There . . . that is right.

Dawn

Flowers wake in whispers from the finger-tips
of night,
But the dark is not yet day;
Birds bethink them, softly, that the East is aging
light,
And the river-bed is dreaming of a robe of white
That is scarcely come to gray.

Far away, but clearly spoken, cock-crows, questioning,
Are a murmur in the ear;
Breaths of voices out of valleys, faint as fancying,
Which, through empty, silent places, chance or
breezes bring
To the lonely mountaineer.

Dawn

Muffled farm-yards follow, and a drowsy fold of sheep;
Then a footstep, passing by; —
Life recurs; where reason falters, faith will overleap:
Death? — but soul is greater! — now, the shaken furls of sleep
Spill their shadows into sky.

Now, the maiden morning flings her tresses full of light,
And the dark is gone away;
Flaunting winds in tree-tops toss derision to the night,
And the clover fields are waiting, and the sea is bright, —
Lives, lives, lives . . . another day!

All Other Loves

Old shadows, when the firelight flickers on the wall;
Old fancies, when the raindrops through the wet leaves fall;—
All other loves begin too late, to own us all.

Her voice let down the bars of sleep and bade us go;
Her touch took tears away, her smile, made well our woe;
The dearest refuge in the world was her "I know."

She gave so much, past life and breath, to us who came
Out of the clouds that wrapped her heart in sudden flame:

All Other Loves

She kissed us with her dreams and taught us,
each, our name.

O lonely fields and empty woods, so frequent,
now —
O fade of childish fingers from a toiler's brow —
Give us the mothers we have lost — we know
not, how!

Old fragrance of wet roses, on the garden wall;
Old songs of candle-light, through leaves wist-
fully that fall; —
All other loves begin too late, to own us all.

The House of the Poet

BARE trees, articulate with sky
As twilight turns.
Bold shadows, such as deify
The tombs of kings. A wind goes by.
A planet burns.

This is the hour when footsteps die,
And griefs commune.
Now is their trysting-time, who cry:
"O wind-blown embers of the sky,
Fade not so soon!"

Fade not so soon: we let them go
So late! (They went
Beyond the utmost isles men know.)
So late; and is their camp-fire's glow
Already spent?

The House of the Poet

These pebbled walks' haphazard ways
Were his, it seems.
He gathered here, with far-off gaze,
His summer-long of nights and days,
Dreaming of dreams.

That was his house: they say one room
Continues there
Just as he left it. (How the gloom
Has deepened!) There are those to whom
Sleep is a prayer.

That very sun-dial, yesterday,
Told off his time.
His hopes, like ours, were witched away;
Bleeding upon its altar lay
His sweetest prime.

Lovers, long dead, perchance did place
Twined fingers there;

And musing in its frowning face,
Forsook it for a swift embrace,
Spurning despair.

Poor loves, they died long years ago.
O wind-blown sky,
Not so! We will not have it so!
With all their clinging troths? Ah, no!
They did not die?

We were not breathed in drifting dust,
O wind-blown sky,
To take untruth from what we trust.
We will not suffer it: we must,
We shall not die!

Those were his rooms: the lower part.
The window-panes
Are new: not those he nicked with art.
He wrote " Forever " on his heart,
And that remains.

Freely, as It Behooves Us

The winds that shout over England
Are even England's own;
The seas that rise around England
Are bred in England's bone.

Far forth the breed has unburdened;
Deep-laid the kinship lies;—
The glint of the hair out of England,
The blue of the English eyes.

Like foam on remote sea islands;
Like surgent, forest flame;—
Like storm on the heels of summer,
The blood of England came.

And now, in our coastwise havens,
  And now, 'neath our churchyard stones,
They lie, who were born in England;
  They live, who are hallowed bones.

And we, with our wide dominions,
  And we, to the setting sun,
Not lightly, but fondly, remember
  What meeds our Mother won.

We mind us of when was England
  The praise our poets sang;
We mind us that still is England
  Oak-parent from whence we sprang.

And ever the winds over England
  Make music in her own;
Sea-fed are we out of England, —
  Bone of her very bone.

Freely, as it Behooves Us

Pour out, O winds, over England,
  Breathless with liberty;
Live on to thy children, O England, —
  Mother beyond the sea.

Epilogue to the American Revolution

SHE that with travail-pains like these
Was brought to birth, who now is grown
Out of her childhood vagaries,
No longer baring, light, her knees,
To venture, with wild hair all blown,
The desperate margins of crude seas;
But is passed on to statelier days,
To milder and more maid-like ways:
What shall we wish for her, our land?
Over what gulfs as yet unspanned, —
By what sheer bridges, prophet-planned,
Make prayer for her, our loved, our land?

Let her not be, in dreams foreshown,
But a bare monument of stone,
Laden with loss, unloved, outgrown;
To speak of dusty ruin more

Epilogue to the American Revolution

Than an unravished prime: nay, for
Her do I crave a dearer thing,
Whose echoes, tide-like, turned again,
Grow richer, and more sweet to sing; —
Of a bright breed of deathless men
Let it be hers — the mothering.

Methinks I see her in such wise,
Long hence, where, sitting with soft eyes,
She watches while her children rise
In ranks around her; till her skies
Are grown with stars, and, like flowers, all
Her children cluster her, nor fall,
Flowerlike, forever; till her hair,
Misty with many moons, is white:
And still, amid the failing light,
She breathes solicitude and care.

Out of the throat of evening now
Come clarions; the cloistered West

A Wand and Strings

Trembles with trumpets, and, her vow
Of silence slipping from her breast,
High on her turrets, golden-tressed,
She takes the fire; she is confessed.

She takes the fire, and lifts her hand
Unto new, starry dreams, a-shine
Beyond the galaxies divine
Of Egypt and of Apennine.
She takes the fire; whose wakeful strand,
Strewn with inviolate seas, is more
Favored than all the isles of yore,
When gods and heroes sang to war,
And dreams were argosies that bore
Brave cargoes to a distant shore. . . .

Thou too, ah, speed thee, speed thee, and
Thy freight of dreams, our loved, our land!

The Washington Statue in Wall Street

IMMORTAL more than bronze, in bronze he stands,
Through all our tumult unperturbed, sedate;
Coming, clear-eyed, out of the scorch of fate,
Rough reins and sword-hilts calloused in his hands.

How large he looms beyond this troubled hill!
How, lost in balancings of life and death,
He heeds the flutter of his country's breath,
And bids "I crave you, gentlemen, be still!"

This was the man who stemmed through brutal seas
And broke the dreadful shadow of a throne;
Who supped with swords, and watched all night alone,
Far off, in some great silence, on his knees.

Fifty Years After

It matters now no more whose eyes were best, —
Which saw at nearest hand the truest truth;
It matters, that both poured their clearest youth
And bravest treasure at the truth's behest.
Truth has her north and south, and each to each,
Being whole wide worlds apart, appears
Far gone in error, bigots with stuffed ears:
They fly to arms; and perish in the breach.
And yet . . . they died for truth . . . both sides
. . . we know.
Their blood still warms the interlying land;
In every breeze their haunting bugles blow,
And flitting shadow-shapes, like storm clouds meet
In forest glades; and where old bridges spanned

[1] By kind permission of Scribner's Magazine.

Fifty Years After

Deep streams, are heard, still, still, their tramping feet.

They leave us not, these dead, but gird us round,
Full panoplied, alert, on either hand;
Marching with her, the reunited land, —
Making her borders undisputed ground.
They leave us not, whose handing-on is ours, —
Unselfishness, and valor, and bright deeds!
By them we know 't is not in vain he bleeds
Whose country rears her children on such flowers.

Rough-Hew Them How We Will

FAR-FLYING warders turn and tell
Of thunders in the Dreadful Hills;
Pale prophets of destruction swell
Beneath our darkened window-sills:
Virtue is dead, they say, and song;
And civic pride is sore beset;
Riches are right, and honor, wrong;
The world remembers — to forget.

How are the walls of Babylon
Tumbled and moulderous and gray! —
And how her ruined Parthenon
The soul of Athens bears away!
Slow-moving as a mist of sleep,
The tides of destiny befall;
Sand cities rearèd heap on heap; —
The ocean overruns them all.

Rough-Hew Them How We Will

Yet are the pinnacles of gold
Beleaguered by our heart's desire,
And still the hands of mortals hold
The anguish of immortal fire:
Death over death, the ramparts rise,
And life on life, the builders go;
The spirit in the coral dies,
The splendors of the coral grow.

What patient orbits lived and burned,
Of ages ere we came to birth?
What spent eternities returned? —
What æons of a single earth?
Deep from the dust of ancient kings
Break forth their battlefields again;
The saga of the deathless rings
Through twice two thousand years of men.

Far-flying warders turn and tell
Of thunders in the Dreadful Hills:

A Wand and Strings

Let them begone — 't is passing well; —
The cowards, with their croak of ills!
Shall at *our* gates the cries resound,
And in *our* streets be flung the flame? —
I stooped, and read upon the ground
The writing of a nameless Name.

To Helen

Unwintry winds wrought with the trees
Till I feigned of far-off seas
And a southern tongue;
And then, like a lake, the placid sky
Was all shaken, and broken; and so was I:
A bird having sung.

A bird; where fell no flute of song
Out of heaven the winter long,
And the dull world lay
A lover, lethargic, weary-worn
With too much denial, and too much of scorn,
And too deep delay.

The sky was shaken by that bird,
And the wind, and I; who heard
His high thrill of joy:

For out of that singing, suddenly, came
The whole vigor of summer, full-flushed, a flame
No death could destroy.

A man looked out on life so long,
He forgot his heart of song
And his minstrel ways;
Till, just of a chance, a child went by,
And she questioned his face — he never knew why —
With a child's quick gaze.

She passed, but oh, she left behind,
In his eyes, no longer blind,
A heaven of blue.
She gave him, you see, his heart again,
With her look of a child, so puzzled at pain:
Helen, it was you!

To Veronica

A WILLOW steeped in moonlight, how she stirs
With what were wind
Too delicate for any boughs but hers! —
See how she trembles, touched of gossamers
The wood-fays twined!

I hear her laughter in forgotten dreams
That come to light
From under apple-blooms and sunset gleams;
Yet, in her robes of witchery, she seems
Too rare for sight.

Once only, dwelling deeply on her eyes,
I saw her plain; —
Out of her childish years, in swift surmise . . .
Then all my dreams into their ancient skies
Flowed back again.

Psyche

THERE 'S a softness in her eyes as of stars in spring;
In her voice there runs the ripple of low streams;
There 's the wonder in her glances of the moon's imagining,
And her ways are like the flutter of late dreams.

I have seen her in her going to the wells at dawn,
When her feet were taking kisses from cool grass;
I have heard her bring her laughter, with the twilight, up the lawn,
And the sound was falling wine-drops in clear glass.

Psyche

Through the years' gray drift and sorrow she
comes eternal still,
With the old, old breathless music in her eyes:
Could a hand be stretched to hold her? . . . I
am left a lonely hill,
And a golden, darting swirl of butterflies.

When the Wind Blows

WHEN the wind blows, Thisbe, from a soft, south land,
And the eyes of sleeping summers dimly stir;
I am minded of a maiden with an idle, outstretched hand, —
She is calling, and I follow, follow her.

When the wind blows, Thisbe, over roofs of rain,
And the withered leaves are scattered from the limb;
There rides a reckless spirit on the whirling weather-vane, —
He is calling, and I follow, follow him.

But and when the wind blows, Thisbe, through my door,

When the Wind Blows

And I open to a moon upon the sea;
'T is a voice of flame that fills me, crying,
"Youth! — forevermore!" —
And I follow, and I follow — follow thee.

From Whence the Road

THERE is a palace in the stars, we know,
And where our lady moon doth softly go,
We follow, wonder-wise;
We build us fancies out of bright, blue seas,
And climb to Arcady on branching trees, —
Straight into Paradise:
But neither kingdoms of the upper air,
Nor caverned waves deliriously fair,
Delight us as the pleasant lands that bear
Our playmates to our eyes.

There is no laughter in the realms of bliss;
We fail of heart with only Artemis
In Arcady, to know;
And Neptune's hands are lean, and parlous cold;
The stars are taken when the clouds unfold;
And branches break with snow:

From Whence the Road

But Playmate-Land is pleasant all the year,
And laughing girls and boys make rare good
cheer;
There is no music such as that we hear
When comrades come and go.

Not high nor hither is it, only there, —
Beyond the hills that rise up everywhere
When all alone we stand;
I would not wander, ever, far away
From where the girls and boys so blithely play
At castles-in-the-sand:
I would not leave them and their laughter; yet —
The years have currents, and they seaward set;
But though I leave, I leave not to forget
My Playmate-Land.

The Klinger Beethoven

Some peaks are tossed too toweringly high
For the spring tides to touch with bloom and
blow;
No violets quicken underneath their snow;
Up their bare cliffs no nesting song-birds fly:
They brood with eagles, above clouds — in sky.
We little guess the cost of it, who know
Only their fertile slopes, down here below; —
God gives them dreams, and will not tell them
why.

Thou great initiate, thy lips are grim
With being past the question-places, now;
There is no grounding at the ancient rim,
Now. As with fire, is made clean thy brow;
Thou knowest, now. Life is no longer dim;
Thy soul surrenders it! What hearest thou?

To an Old Family Servant

Dead? — but I cannot think it; he who wore
His livery of smiles undimmed to sight;
Our childhood's fellowship who kept, of right;
Whose loyalty . . . no belted earl had more.
He stood so often at the stable door,
Lifting his lantern, signalling "Good night!" —
To follow me half home with friendly light:
I cannot think . . . he never failed before.

Yes, it is I who stand, good friend of years,
Blinded with shadow, where your footfalls fell;
To cast the glimmer of my childhood's tears
Beyond the dark, beyond the funeral bell,
Beyond the silence; I — God grant he hears —
Who lift the lantern, now: good-night! — farewell!

A Prelude to Hamlet

SCENE: *Wittenberg. Hamlet's rooms.*

HAMLET. HORATIO. PLAYERS.

HOR.

A jovial play!

HAM.

One Jove himself might use
To catch applauding thunders from the crown
Of cold Olympus! So, begone, good friends:
To-morrow sennight, in the Provost's house.

FIRST PLAY.

Yes, my lord. (*Exeunt.*)

HAM.

Here, Horatio, is a jest.

HOR.

Another courtier to your cozened king?

HAM.

Intending? courtier?

HOR.

Such a hanger-on
As cloys up counsel with his idle tongue,
And pulls the arras on affairs of state.
Hamlet, my lord —

HAM.

My lord, Horatio!

HOR.

I cannot jest with you.

HAM.

Then, if that be,
Jest on without me; so you do but jest,
And make not wry-mouths for my putting-on,
After Diogenes!

HOR.

Diogenes?

HAM.

Lived in a tub, and taught men not to wash.

HOR.

Was even a philosopher —

HAM.

And stank!

HOR.

Like Plato, whose Apology, we read —

HAM.

" Plato went a-fishing in a cask of wine."
'T was an excellent catch, with good descant in 't.

HOR.

Plato was the first of all the world —

HAM.

Is 't even so? I had thought 't was Adam.

HOR.

To touch the peaks of pure philosophy.

HAM.

O cold Philosophy!

HOR.

Philosophy,
My lord, is treasure in the soul.
Compacted, like sweet essences of flowers,

A Prelude to Hamlet

By nimble bees, out of the niggard earth,
Its individual drops make up a sum
More precious than the galleon fleets of Spain.
It is the very astrolabe of life;
For in the thickness of our haughty stars
It plots the compass points whereby we steer,
Land being lost. It is the truest gold:
The rheumy bilges of our deepest days
Tarnish it not: it takes no loss of thieves;
Nor is it tempted at the cannon's mouth.
Let ruin rage, and the piled rack put on
Such pitch of choler, that the welkin yawns
And empties hell from heaven. Be it so:
I fear it not; I have philosophy.
Strip me my coat; put loop-holes in my purse;
Unhouse me friendless, on the wintry blast;
I have philosophy.

HAM.

And having it,
What then?

HOR.

I would thou also hadst it.

HAM.

Nay!

I need it not: I know a better charm.

HOR.

As?

HAM.

Life, life, life: 't is a rare time for jests.

HOR.

I would I thought it!

HAM.

Marry, so do I!

For then the corners of the turned-down moon

Were tipped to heaven. Come, Horatio, laugh!

HOR.

I 'll smile, when thou dost think.

HAM.

I do think!

HOR.

Jests.

HAM.

I think thou hast an addled pate,
An' if thou choose, I 'll think some more of thee:
I 'll think thy liver loves thee not. In short,
That thou dost chide, I know; that thou art sad,
I think; but that thou chidest and art sad,
Marries distemper to my mother wit:
I cannot think thou entertainest both.
Your chider makes more merry at his meals.
Conclusion; I 'll not think at all.

HOR.

My lord —

HAM.

Nay, hear me out! I am a man, Horatio,
Much given to the uses of this world:

I sleep, wake, eat, drink, laugh, sing, fight,
have friends, —
Even as I breathe. I am alive; what then?
Wouldst curb me to a mincing jennet's gait?
I am a blooded barb, and course the fields!
I am —

(*Knocking without.*)

Who knocks? (*Enter* MESSENGER.)
Who are you? What 's the word?

MESS.

I come from Elsinore.

HAM.

From Elsinore!
What 's there?

MESS.

Ill, ill, my lord.

HAM.

How, ill? What 's ill?

MESS.

The state, my lord.

HAM.

Is Fortinbras forsworn?
Tempts he the lightning on his lifted glaive?
By heaven, if he looks for war —

MESS.

Nay, he doth not:
The rule is peace. 'Tis nigher home than war.

HAM.

My mother?

MESS.

Bids her son be brave; —

HAM.

Is she ill?

MESS.

Not so, my lord.

HAM.

Speak, then: put it in words!

MESS.

My lord, your Father —

HAM.

My Father!

MESS.

He.

HAM.

I had not thought of that.

MESS.

Is dead, my lord.

HAM.

Is dead; what means, is dead? 't is not my tongue.
He points some jest with me, Horatio; wags
Would dupe my bludgeon, crying, "Thieves! ho! ha!"
They 'll laugh to see me drawn. My Father; nay! —
Not mine; he would not. Fathers of young men
Fill out more age. They pass not, out of time,

In blowsy August, flushed with midsummer sun;
But stop till beards grow long, then waste away,
In hoar December, solemnized with snow.
How did he die? Come, come, come! tell me, how?

MESS.

He took siesta in his orchard-close;—

HAM.

So did he every afternoon.

MESS.

The where
A serpent stung him.

HAM.

And he died of it?

MESS.

He never waked: the wind blew out his light.

HAM.

O churlish serpent, so to sting my Father!

HOR.

What certifies the verity of this?

MESS.

My lord, I bear dead Hamlet's signet ring.

HAM.

It is the very stone that sank his will.

HOR.

Return to Elsinore: say Hamlet comes,
In his first filial tears, to serve the state.

(*Exit* MESSENGER.)

HAM.

Can this be truth? Is it not I who sleep,
And in my sleep a serpent tooth stings me?
Were it not better to be loathed of dreams;
To wear cold, graveyard beads on a scared brow,
And sunk, nine fathom deep, in dreadful shades,
To lap the ichor of some ghastly ill;

Than live, and breathe, and know myself
awake
In the full world, no likelier beyond?
Horatio?

HOR.

Alas, it is the truth, my lord.

HAM.

Then give me truth no more, Horatio.
I relish not the dreams thou hast, in this
Thy world. I would hazard another.

HOR.

Nay!
It fits thee to be brave; to serve the state.

HAM.

I can remember, one proud, careless day,
When all the meads were daisy-pied, and birds
Made jocund warble in the forest glades,
Seeing my Father ride, enthroned in mail;
For face and figure, like a gathering storm:
Till, lending me his eyes, methought the sun

Had leaped from heaven and lighted in his face.
Then, with a world of smiles, he stooped him down
And swung me to his bow. Would 't were to-day!

(*Enter* ROSENCRANTZ *and* GUILDENSTERN.)

ROS.

Who is it?

HOR.

Hamlet.

GUILD.

Hamlet! what 's i' the wind?

HOR.

'T is winter, and the wind is in the north.
But, sirs, I pray you, have you hence; the while
A noble sorrow finds a seasoned home.
Be kind. Let Job want comforters, not friends.

ROS. and GUILD.

Our fellowship incites it. Fare you well.
(*Aside*) We 'll go and bruit the news in Wittenberg.

HOR.

Farewell. (*Exeunt.*) I, too, dear Hamlet, will be kind,
And leave thee. May the gentle rain come soon. (*Exit.*)

HAM.

It needed not till now to chirp me bold.
He paints dishonor into Hamlet's blood
Who pricks his withers. Yet hath some new thing
Impeached the turbid current of my veins,
Sickened my heart, and made my pulses slow:
The very sign and likeness of the fault
That slew my Father. O, it uproots the world,
That I, my Father's son, am come to this;

To think what next? The enraging horn
Rebukes the cowards only, not the brave;
The valiant are already in the fight.
I never weighed before. Enough: my woe
Must ravel out. To Elsinore I go.

(*Curtain.*)

Legend

Long and long and long ago,
  In lands not known to me,
Winds blew loud and winds blew low,
  And ships went out to sea.

Many ships with merchandise,
  And some with kings and queens
Sailing far, with shining eyes,
  Over the blues and greens.

One there was, their singers say,
  A ship surpassing fair,
Shaped for every wind; whose way
  Was very debonair.

A Wand and Strings

Never yet beyond the bar
  Had swung her yard-arms free;
Never yet her lantern star
  Had dimmed with dawn at sea.

Freshly builded, there she lay,
  Almost a living thing;
Bird-like, beautiful as day, —
  A vessel for a king.

Men loved then as men love now;
  The king's dear, only son
Loved a maid with blushing brow, —
  The king chose a different one.

Crossed is true, and true is bold,
  The lovers found a way;
Just when evening bells were tolled,
  Came through the twilight they.

Legend

Came to where the good ship swung
  Upon an ebbing tide;
Close aboard her bulwarks clung, —
  Scaled her untarnished side.

"Cast off! — quick! — set sail! — to sea!"
  The skipper turned, and scanned
Such mere children scornfully; —
  They stood there hand in hand.

"Quick, I tell you, quick! — to sea!
  Your sovereign, the king,
Bids you make all speed with me;
  Here is his signet ring."

That was pain of death to spurn,
  Or even to delay;
Regally the ring did burn, —
  He dared not disobey.

A Wand and Strings

Capstan bar and anchor chain, —
  The canvas fluttered free;
Lower loomed the land, more plain,
  With whispers, was the sea.

Lookouts for'ard, dipping lead,
  A break along the bar;
Out into the dark they fled,
  With one low, lantern star.

Out into the dark they fled,
  And were not heard from more;
None did see, alive or dead,
  Any that vessel bore.

Stories, so the singers say,
  Grew up as years went by;
Ships there were that sailed away
  And took brave men to die.

Legend

They were ships, the gossips hold,
  Had tossed their moorings free
Just as evening bells were tolled
  And twilight touched the sea.

Just as turned the full ebb-tide
  Seaward, all murmuring; —
Setting, softly, overside
  Two lovers with a ring.

Some there be who still aver
  Those children, deathly pale,
Come, like mist, in minever,
  To ships about to sail.

Just as towards the sea the tide
  Moves out with murmuring,
Steal they, softly, overside; —
  Two lovers with a ring.

A Wand and Strings

Woe the ship that then sets sail!
  She will not come to shore:
Lights of home along her rail
  Will never see her more.

. . . . . .

It is true, for aught I know;
  Strange things there used to be,
Long and long and long ago;
  In lands beyond the sea.

Now That We Know

We left the half of youth behind,
Long and long ago;
Frail apple-bloom and honey-lined,
It fluttered free, it took the wind; —
Vanished, then, like snow.

We left a little more of youth,
Lightly, by the way:
For what they told us was "The Truth"
We gave it, at a gilded booth,
Keeping holiday.

We lost the next in love's emprise;
For a lady fair:
She held us with her bright blue eyes,

And drew our hearts away with sighs; —
Left us bleeding there.

We buried some with comrades bold,
Some was lost at sea;
Some of it perished, some was sold;
Some — God help us! — we killed with cold; —
Wicked and foolish, we!

Now — there remains us just one spark,
Very faint, I wis;
But ocean-battered, bittered, stark,
This candle steers us through the dark; —
We 'll not squander this.

Knight's Parting

THEN here we part, old comrade; spending down
The last, slim coin of all our treasured years.
I would it were not so; that duty ran
More consonant with being — just a friend.
'T were truthful happiness to ride
The whole world underfoot, with thee —
Just ride, and jangle swords . . .
Our lot is burned
With other tokens: there are stars to seek;
And in the seeking of those fatal stars
Friends fade behind us, and the early scope
Of our addition brims at last too wide
For the one track. We knew it, yet we feigned —
Till now.
Go, comrade, into lands that lie
Like music from an unstopped, open reed,
Shaped for thy fingering. Go where the dawn

A Wand and Strings

Plucks roses from the heavy eaves of night,
And drops them full of dew: where birds bring
down
The cadences that heaven's choirs die on;
And where, for very love, the winds are low . . .

Nay! — but I wish thee better: sweet is pain
To a high heart. I wish thee all of these,
But broken, into little, island joys
That thou shalt touch at, with strong tides be-
tween:
Or strewn, like flowers in the tousled grain,
That stir not with the shadows of the storm.

I wish thee into deserts and through thorns; —
To challenge castles, frowning from dark crags,
With bugle blast and impudent, rung shield;
To split the frontlets through of champions
That glimmer under moons in forest glades,

And wrest the sword-hilts from the hairy hands
Of belted giants thundering thee down
Through rocky clefts where cataracts are blown.
I wish thee sleep, at night, and death, at last, —
In open sky. God give thee glory, and
A blameless bed to lie on!

As for me —
I here embark; even in yonder boat
That bears the sunset in her breathing sail,
And frets upon the roadstead like a steed
Sniffing the sky. The shallop at the stairs
Is hers, and waits for me.

I here embark
Old comrade, knowing not at all the end;
But only that the sea and I are met,
At last. I know not: haply I shall drink
Dark nights of storm, and days of doubt, until

A Wand and Strings

My soul is struggled out of cloud, a rifted star
God will make sure of only in that way.

O thou most mighty sea, there burns no sail
Along the margins of thy western gold, —
To lift enchanted islands from thy breast, —
Except, in faith, it leave sweet shores behind,
And faring forth, undaunted, and alone,
Plunge upon open emptiness. So I . . .

The dusk is heavy, now; the sea dips low:
The harbor must be cleared betimes; come — here
We part, old comrade. To our stars! — farewell!

The Trail of Silence

THE shoaling waves shake loose their light far
out from shore,
And, one by one, the setting sun surrender o'er;
The shadow pools are filling up with night once
more.

Faint wagon wheels, and murmurs of the day's
toil die;
Across the dusty country road the crickets cry;
The clover fields are drowsy under low-looped
sky.

Ah, soon, too soon, the full dark breaks on you
and me;
Too soon, too soon, is saddened all the jocund
sea;

A Wand and Strings

A wind that whispers silence goes from tree to tree.

The meadow mists are half, white wraiths and half, thin air;
Irresolute to be of earth, or float, like prayer;
The clover fields spread out in sleep their perfumed hair.

To-morrow? will to-morrow strip these fears away?
How came it that we faltered only now, to-day?
You spoke, there fell a silence, and — we both obey.

We never asked for this of life: whence came it? why?
Perchance we never lived at all here, you and I,
Unless to meet each other under just this sky.

The Trail of Silence

And now the trail of silence runs through all our land; —
No word or look between us, helpless, hand in hand:
Only the ocean, breathing, up long leagues of sand.

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